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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004373

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SUBJECT: IRAQ,S KURDISH, SUNNI, SHIITE LEADERS PLEDGE
UNITY, FORM WORKING GROUP

REF: BAGHDAD 04361

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: At a November 26 meeting, SCIRI chairman and Shi'a coalition leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim and Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi (IIP/Sunni) continued discussions started November 25 (reftel). President Talabani (PUK), Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Masud Barzani (KDP), Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih (PUK), Vice President Adil Abdul Mahdi (SCIRI), and the Ambassador also attended. The group identified Iraq's major problems, discussed the causes of the government's current crisis and pledged cooperation. The Kurdish and Shi'a representatives assured al-Hashimi that they want a strong Sunni partner. The attendees formed a working group which will meet together to coordinate solutions to Iraq's most pressing issues. End Summary.

MAIN PROBLEMS: GOI PERFORMANCE, RECONCILIATION AND SECURITY

¶2. (S) SCIRI chairman and Shi'a coalition leader Abdualziz al-Hakim began the meeting commenting that moderate forces need better coordination as they work to strengthen unity and prioritize Iraq's problems. As the meeting progressed, the participants identified the government's unsatisfactory performance, national reconciliation, and Baghdad security as the most pressing issues. Al-Hashimi noted that the Saddamists and the Baathists are not solely responsible for Iraq's problems and they should not be blamed for everything that goes wrong.

¶3. (S) Evaluating the GOI's overall performance and commenting specifically on the Prime Minister, Talabani said that while he believes the PM should stay in power, he "needs to change his conduct" and the government "has to change." There is a problem with the Council of Ministers and how the PM handles them, he noted. Al-Hakim commented that the PM "does not listen," and does not share his ideas. Al-Hashimi agreed, saying that decisions are currently made without consulting all political leaders. Hashimi added that the PM developed strategies and asked people to accept and implement them without explaining the background. There needs to be better coordination among the decision-makers, al-Hashimi emphasized. Deputy Prime Minister Salih stated that the PM needs support but he also needs to "activate government participation" by including all groups in the process.

¶4. (S) Al-Hashimi commented that the national reconciliation program desperately needs to be revived. Praising Maliki's 24 point plan, he said that this "great document" has not been sufficiently implemented. He cited the postponed political parties conference as an example, noting that he had seen it as an important opportunity to bring people

together. The meeting participants unanimously agreed Baghdad security needs to be addressed immediately. Al-Hashimi cited the current Baghdad Security Plan as an example of poor coordination among political decision-makers and commented that if the Sunnis were treated as partners and allowed to "shoulder some of the responsibility" they could help devise a better strategy.

STEPS FORWARD: IMPROVED COORDINATION, UNITY AND CONFIDENCE

15. (S) DPM Salih commented that wise decision-making has been impeded "due to lack of proper political coordination." Observing that unity is required between political leaders making key decisions, KRG President Barzani stated that GOI officials "cannot be with the government and against the government at the same time." While there are legal ways to oppose the administration, he said, forces within the political process should not be working to undermine the GOI.

16. (S) Barzani noted that political leaders need to have confidence in their abilities to make decision and effect change, while the Iraqi people need to have confidence that the GOI will respond to their needs. Al-Hashimi reiterated previous statements that IIP specifically and Sunnis in general "do not feel like partners." It is not possible for me to respond to my constituents' needs or build their confidence in IIP's abilities, he continued, because we have no role in decision-making.

EMPOWERING THE SUNNIS, INCREASING COOPERATION

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17. (S) Noting that having SCIRI and IIP sitting together "is a great development," Talabani pledged support to al-Hashimi. Talabani commented that while all political groups face challenges in dealing with their constituencies, al-Hashimi's situation is particularly complex. It is in our interest, Talabani continued, to have a strong Sunni leader empowered by his people. We want the Sunnis to be a partner in both obligations and rights, Talabani concluded, and "we have a responsibility to help them."

18. (S) Al-Hakim stated that "SCIRI wants to work together with the good components of all the political blocs." Al-Hashimi noted his good working relationship with President Talabani and Vice President Abdul Mahdi (SCIRI) and welcomed working "as a team" with other like-minded political leaders. Salih noted that the meetings November 25 and 26 demonstrate "moderates from any party can work together."

FORMING A NEW POLITICAL CORE WORKING GROUP

19. (S) Identifying four things which need to be done to improve the current situation - support government institutions, support the Iraqi constitution, fight terrorists, and fight militias - Salih suggested the meeting's participants, as the center of the country's political leadership, continue to meet. Talabani and al-Hashimi agreed that a small, core working group should meet regularly. Al-Hakim suggested that President Talabani, along with his two Vice Presidents, should organize "the points and mechanisms" identified by the group and then schedule a follow-up meeting. Suggestions could then be presented to the PM and the full Political Council for National Security (PCNS).

COMMENT

¶10. (S) This meeting was a net positive: Kurdish, SCIRI, and IIP leadership discussed together their frustrations, opinions and ways forward. Its real success will be defined by whether future meetings between this small group of political elites result in sufficient support to stem violence, increase government effectiveness and further reconciliation. Creating this working group may help address some of al-Hashimi's complaints that he is isolated and marginalized. The group's major challenge will be working in partnership with the Prime Minister and the other political groups not represented. The Ambassador is hosting a meeting of the Kurds, SCIRI, and the IIP leadership with the Prime Minister on the 27th.
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